

Recd from Dr K Ghoshade

We are glad to tell you that the first number of our Bulletin for Bird Watchers has met with an encouraging response. Extracts from a few letters are reproduced:

"Thank you for the first News Letter for Bird Watchers. I feel that we should start making members and collecting fees now. Will you please send me application forms as soon as it is decided to do so." - Shivraj Kumar - Jasdan.

"Thank you for the News Letter for Bird Watchers. I have read the copy with great interest I am all for such a group. Please let me know if there are any formalities. You are welcome to reproduce in the bulletin, the article 'The Iora and Camouflage' which appeared in Samachar 59. I shall hunt up and send you a few earlier numbers too in which the Ramblers' notes have appeared. You will, of course have to use the blue pencil for the material which is meant for the members of the school community." - N. L. Khanolkar - Poona.

"I was very interested to read the first number of your News Letter for Bird Watchers. I am enclosing a cheque for Rs 15/- and shall be grateful if you will enrol me as a member." - A. S. Gilani - New Delhi.

(Fortunately, the cheque was not enclosed, otherwise we would not have known what to do with it, as we have not yet opened our subscription list.)

"I have seen the first of your ornithological bulletins, and I must say it reaches a very high standard. I shall look forward to seeing future copies. Will you please ask Salim to pay my subscription to this service?" - Loke Wan Tho - Singapore.

"Thanks awfully for your letter of the 6th and for the Bulletins for 'Bird Watchers'. I am afraid that these arrived after most of our keen bird watchers had gone off for the N.C.C. camp. I am however keeping them and will distribute them next term." - J. M. Gibson - Ajmer.

"I am sure the News Letter can be developed into a first rate journal on Ornithology, and I shall be glad to give whatever help I can to the News Letter." - Joseph George - Dehra Dun.

Bird Ringing in India:

The Bombay Natural History Society in collaboration with the Virus Research Centre, Poona, and WHO, has been conducting a series of camps for the study of bird migration cum bird borne virus diseases. Birds are caught in mist nets and released after being searched for ectoparasites, with a ring with a serial number and "Inform. B. Bombay Natural History Society" on it. The first two camps, in September 1959 at Changalra Kutch, and in March 1960 at Kuar Bet, Kutch, yielded 1751 and 1000 birds respectively. The Kuar Bet figure of 1001 birds included 322 migrants. In September 1960 two camps, one at Jalandar Bet, near Jhunjhuvada, and the other at Hingolghadh near Jasdan were held. Both these places are in Saurashtra. The Jalandar Bet camp gave 1036 birds of which 336 or 32.45% were migrants, while 1232 birds out of which 630 or over 51% were migrants were caught at Hingolghadh. To study the pattern of migration Dr. Salim Ali asked me to continue netting independently on a small scale at Jasdan. Nets were put up on 10/11th and 20/21st October, 1960, and yielded 344 birds of which 263 were migrants.

For both the amateur bird lover and the serious student, bird netting and ringing can be of great educational value. It is also exciting. One never knows what will next turn up in a mist net during the migration periods. As the present series of camps are to be continued in 1961, it is to be hoped that more interested people will take advantage of the opportunities offered for learning the technique of bird netting and ringing, so that in future a large number of centres can be worked simultaneously and enable us to get a clearer picture of the movements of our migratory birds. - Shivraj Kumar - Jasdan.

Bird Migration:

It is a shame, but true, that we have done little in the last ten years to add to the knowledge passed on to us by the British about the migratory birds which enter and leave this country every year. In the days before independence, British Army Officers stationed along the North-Western Frontier enlivened their weary days by trying to trace the routes these birds favoured for their migration; and as a result of these observations, we know that they mainly crossed into India along the north-east and north-west wings of the Himalayan range: but what of the widely held (but unconfirmed) belief that over the higher regions they took a more direct route?

Almost nothing has been done to check the validity of this belief, in spite of the fact that there have been numerous opportunities in the past decade to do so. As a well-known ornithologist pointed out in the course of a talk in Delhi this week, the many expeditions to the Himalayas in recent years could have been used to accumulate valuable data on this and allied questions. But though "consulting ornithologists" have formed part of nearly every expedition, their services have seldom been put to the best possible use. This at least is one omission we can rectify in future.

Extracts:- 'Christian Science Monitor', Nov. 10-1960.

Something New: Airport for the Birds - By Helen Stewart Knaus - Miami Springs, Fla

According to an old English poem, an owl once went to sea. Today some of its modern cousins in Florida go to an airport, which proves there is something new under the sun.

In Miami, Fla., a wildlife sanctuary is located in the heart of a man-made pandemonium of noise and activity. The inhabitants of the sanctuary are small burrowing owls, and the only way to see them is to get a ticket and get on a plane. As the plane taxis out to a take-off position the owls are clearly visible in grassy areas along the runways.

Unlike many people who complain about the sound of highspeed jets departing from and arriving at busy International Airport, these little feathered home-steaders seem completely disinterested in everything but their own affairs and are happily adjusted to their environment.

Many years ago when the airport was built, the small cave dwellers began nesting, or burrowing, between the runways. With the wisdom of the wild, they appeared to know such a place would provide them with privacy from both animals and people. Also, it is one of the few places left on the coastal ridge of Florida which gives them a place to burrow down six feet at an angle and not strike excessive moisture.

The owls feed on rodents, crayfish, and crabs. Nearby canals around the airport overflow the surrounding areas during excessive rains and send the crabs and crayfish scurrying for higher ground, and field mice abound all over this section. The tiny burrowers make a vibrating, motorlike sound during the process of their various activities, and on clear nights residents for a mile or two around the airport are able to hear them clearly.

Several years ago when the colony gained notoriety through a local newspaper story, requests poured in to the port director from bird lovers who were eager to visit the owls. Permission was denied.

The birds have continued to multiply and it is estimated that hundreds make their homes between the runways. Perhaps they feel no need of official protection, but recently the airport was declared a burrowing owl wildlife sanctuary, with the Florida Audubon Society co-operating with the Dade County Port Authority.

Actually, these birds enjoy more privacy and protection than they would have in the wilds of the Kissimmee Prairie where they live in large colonies. The burrowing owl is also native to the islands of Bahama and Guadalupe, and they are frequently seen on the open plains of North and South America. With its long legs, the owl averages about 10 inches in height. It is brownish in colour, variously barred and spotted with lighter and darker hues.

Airport personnel never interfere with the domestic life of their tenant owls, unless one insists in making a burrow at the edge of a runway. Then the cavity is filled immediately in order to prevent erosion, and the burrower is forced into the open where there is ample room for tunneling.

The manner in which these owls have adapted themselves to man's inventions is similar to the way rabbits live between the runways at Los Angeles Airport. Unlike the owls and rabbits, the gooney birds, or albatross, have never yielded to man at Midway Island.

The International Airport owls are not only wise; they are well-mannered and courteous. They do not overstep the boundaries of their no-man's land between the airstrips; and even in flight, they have never been known to challenge a plane, even in a full-throttle take-off. Perhaps they have their own signals to the tower, such as, "Please clear runway five" or whatever they may wish to use for a quick getaway. At any rate, there are no known casualties among them.

The burrowing owl and the Dade County Port Authority seem to have an unwritten agreement. The port authority controls the runways, and the owls govern the areas in between.

Zafar Futehally,

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